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RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 4269
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RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 4886
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0738
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0519
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0765
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 4466
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2757
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0777
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 7538
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1416
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC 0322
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2724
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC 0173
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0329
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1992
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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN

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TAGS: [KNNP](#) [ASEC](#) [PREL](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: AGREEMENT TO HELP SECURE UZBEKISTAN'S
BORDERS

REF: A. TASHKENT 43
[1](#)B. TASHKENT 478
[1](#)C. TASHKENT 661

Classified By: Poloff Steven Prohaska for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On August 5-8, representatives from the U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration and Pacific Northwest National Laboratory met with representatives from Uzbekistan's Institute of Nuclear Physics (INP) to negotiate a contract on maintenance of the radiation portal monitors on Uzbekistan's borders. INP and Customs representatives discussed their efforts to interdict radioactive materials, recent incidents involving the seizure of these, interagency cooperation, training and relevant procedures, and gaps in their capabilities. The officials also escorted the U.S. side to Nazarbek point of entry for a site visit. From our discussions with these officials, it appears that Uzbekistan has been vigilant in monitoring the country's borders against potential proliferation threats, and the new contract should go into effect once INP receives approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On August 5-8, representatives from the U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Agency and Pacific Northwest National Laboratory met with representatives from Uzbekistan's Institute of Nuclear Physics (INP) to negotiate an agreement on maintenance of the radiation portal monitors at 27 of Uzbekistan's points of entry that the Defense Threat Reduction Agency installed. Director Umar Salikhbaev, Leading Researcher Vitaliy Petrenko, and several others represented INP.

[1](#)3. (C) Director Salikhbaev reminisced about the strong cooperation that had taken place between Uzbekistan and the U.S. in 2002, and expressed hope that the new agreement would

yield further fruitful cooperation. Petrenko said that INP is badly in need of spare parts to maintain the radiation portal monitors, and asked that the U.S. consider equipping three more points of entry--to which the necessary equipment has already been delivered, but require training of personnel and installation of the equipment--to complement the existing ¶27. "If there is an opportunity, think about it," he urged.

INP's Counterproliferation Efforts

¶4. (C) Petrenko said that INP's primary objective is to keep radioactive materials from going south, and noted that there have been several instances of trains carrying radioactive materials bound for Iran being stopped. He noted that INP has the capability to watch all 27 sites for alarms associated with a radiation detection incident. "If an alarm goes off now, we'll hear it," he said, and INP would also know immediately where the alarm had come from. Petrenko said that INP would then provide instructions to the State Customs Committee.

Recent Examples of Interdiction of Radioactive Materials

¶5. (C) Petrenko described some recent examples of unsanctioned smuggling, citing an incident last November involving the transit of a cargo of radioactive materials from Kyrgyzstan, across the territory of Kazakhstan, and interdiction at Nazarbek point of entry (reftel A). He said

that INP did not have the opportunity to open the container there, but Uzbekistan had sent the cargo back to Kyrgyzstan. Petrenko admitted that they did not know precisely what was in the traincar. (Comment: Petrenko may have been reluctant to discuss this in detail given the sensitivity of the issue.

End comment.) Petrenko described Nazarbek as unusual because of its lack of border control checks--cargo is physically inspected at other stations--and praised Customs for reacting quickly and checking the train with handheld radiation detectors.

¶6. (C) He also cited a case in January of a Chinese geophysicist who had arrived in Tashkent from Beijing. The geophysicist was carrying a book that contained four radioactive laminated sources, which he claimed were necessary for his work. Following a court case, the radioactive materials were handed over to INP. Petrenko explained that in this and other cases of radioactive smuggling, multiple parties--including INP, Customs, and the Ministry of Emergency Situations (MChS)--are involved. (Note: A Customs official later told the U.S. side that the Border Guards of the National Security Service are also involved. End note.) He said that Customs, which has an anti-smuggling division, informs other GOU agencies.

¶7. (C) Reinforcing a point he has made before, Petrenko said that it is very important that INP have 24-hour coverage of the points of entry and mentioned plans to hire an additional five personnel to provide this coverage. Petrenko noted that the incident at Nazarbek had taken place at night, but that INP did not notice the alarm until the next morning. Petrenko described relations between INP and Customs as good, and said that Customs calls INP frequently regarding radiation alarms. INP is able to respond to such calls if the incidents take place during the day, he continued.

Some Innocent Alarms

¶8. (C) There have been some innocent alarms, Petrenko said, but the number varies depending on the post. Nazarbek, for instance, sees a great deal of cargo transit. He explained that trains carrying fertilizer or cement were especially prone to innocent radiation alarms. Petrenko noted an innocent neutron alarm over a year ago triggered by a train carrying uranium ore. After each alarm, Customs fills out an electronic form, he said. If a pedestrian is involved in the

radiation alarm, the procedure is simple--the person is detained and questioned.

Training for an Increasingly Disciplined, Prestigious Customs

¶9. (C) An 80-hour INP training course intended to familiarize Customs officials with radiation issues is now standard in the Customs curriculum, Petrenko said. Petrenko and his colleagues noted that discipline and oversight at the State Customs Committee have been improving, in contrast to about five years ago when Customs officers would intentionally trigger the alarms so they could have their pictures taken. Working for Customs is also considered prestigious, they said. (Comment: This is consistent with our other observations, as there are about 20 applicants for each available slot at the Higher Military Customs Institute, ref tel C. End comment.)

Preventive Maintenance at the Portal Monitors

¶10. (C) INP teams of at least three--but preferably four--personnel visit the 27 points of entry four times per year to conduct preventive maintenance and to train Customs officials at the checkpoints, Petrenko said. The length of this training varies between 12 and 16 hours, and is necessary on a regular basis because of the frequent rotations in Customs. The INP teams instruct Customs personnel on how to react to alarms and fill out the required forms. The language barrier sometimes posed a problem, however, as not all Customs personnel can speak Russian, they noted.

Trip to Nazarbek POE

¶11. (C) On August 7, representatives from Uzbekistan's INP and State Customs Committee escorted the members of the U.S. side to the Nazarbek point of entry located on Uzbekistan's border with Kazakhstan. The team observed two of the site's four radiation portal monitors--one on either side of the tracks to screen inbound and outbound trains--on the way to the main Customs office. Customs officials noted that cargo transits Nazarbek 24 hours a day. About ten trains transit in and out per day, but more often at night. Because even cement can trigger an alarm, the post sees up to 40 alarms per day. Whenever there is an incident, a Customs officer approaches the car in question with a radioisotope identification device, examines the car, checks its licenses, and fills out a detailed form.

¶12. (C) Customs officials said that the post has seven personnel, all of which have university degrees. Each person receives special training from the Higher Military Customs Institute to be certified on the radiation detection system. Each person receives refresher training on-site on a monthly basis. Each post has its own power generator and a backup power supply.

¶13. (C) They mentioned a few problems with their equipment, notably with one of the four cameras monitoring inbound and outbound trains--the camera was functioning, but could not record anything it observed. They also noted difficulties in obtaining spare parts for the cameras and replacement cartridges for color printers.

¶14. (C) The Customs officials corroborated earlier INP statements in noting that false neutron alarms sometimes occur when the monitors detect uranium from ore mines in Navoiy. They also described the November 29 seizure of radioactive scrap metal inbound from Kyrgyzstan, and how INP staff visited the site and conducted an analysis before the return of the train to Kyrgyzstan on December 31. They said that they do interact with their counterparts at other border crossing points in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and complained about disagreements with Kyrgyzstan as to whether the radioactive materials had been placed in the train in

Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan.

Comment:

¶15. (C) Pending approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the new bilateral contract on maintenance of the

radiation portal monitors on Uzbekistan's borders will go into effect. As the interdictions of various radioactive materials transiting Uzbekistan's borders in recent memory have shown, this is an area in which many in Uzbekistan appear interested in further cooperation and information-sharing to counter threats of mutual concern. The U.S. side was impressed with the professionalism of the INP and Customs officials it met with, and it is clear that the collaborative work between INP and Customs is having a positive impact improving Uzbekistan's ability to secure its borders. Despite some problems with technical equipment, the large number of innocent alarms is a positive sign that Government of Uzbekistan officials have been vigilant in monitoring Uzbekistan's borders against potential proliferation threats.

¶16. (U) This cable has been cleared with DOE/NNSA.
BUTCHER